‘ÍSÁ IBN HISHÁM related to us and said: There used to reach me of the maqámát and sayings of al-Iskanderí 4 such as would arrest the fugitive and agitate the sparrow. Poems of his have been recited to us whose refinement pervades the soul in all its parts, and whose subtlety is hidden from the imaginations of the wizards. 5 And I pray God to spare him so that I may meet him and marvel at his indifference 6 to his condition in spite of his art

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and fortune. Fortune had made her benefits 1 remote by placing barriers between him and them and continued so to do till I happened to have some business in Ḥimṣ. 2 So I sharpened my greediness of desire to go thither in the company of some individuals, brilliant as the stars of night, and like saddle-cloths cleaving to the backs of the horses. We started on the road eliminating its distance 3 and annihilating its space, and we continued to traverse the humps of the uplands, mounted upon those noble steeds, until they became as lean as walking-sticks and were bent like bows. Now we were fated to pass a valley along the base of a mountain covered with ala and tamarisk thickets which looked like maidens with their flowing tresses and suspended locks. 4 The fierce noonday heat turned us thither to seek a sheltered spot and a midday nap. We had tethered our horses and had addressed ourselves to sleep with the sleepers, when suddenly the neighing of the horses startled us. And I looked towards my steed and behold he had cocked his ears, he was glaring with his eyes, gnawing the strands of the rope with his lips, and scoring the surface of the ground with his hoofs. Then the horses stampeded, 5 staled, broke the ropes and made for the mountains. Every one of us flew to his weapons when lo! there appeared a lion, in the garb 6 of doom, ascending from his lair, with inflated skin, 7 showing his teeth, with an eye full of arrogance, a nose distended with pride, and a breast from which courage 8 never departed and wherein terror never dwelt. We said: 'This is a serious matter and an anxious business.' There advanced to meet him from among the impetuous of the party a youth,

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'Tawny of skin 1 of the family that comprises the nobility of the Arabs,
Who fills his bucket full to the knot of the rope that ties the middle of the cross-bars,'

with a heart urged on by doom, and an all-effective sword, but the fierceness of the lion took possession of him and the ground cheated his feet so that he fell on his hands and face. The lion then crossed over the place of his falling in the direction of those who were with him. Then death summoned the fallen one's fellow in the same manner. He advanced, but terror tied his hands, he fell to the earth and the lion crouched 2 on his chest. But I threw my turban at him and diverted his mouth and thus prevented the shedding of the youth's blood. Then the young man arose and slashed at his stomach until he collapsed with fright and the lion died of the wounds in his stomach. We then went after the horses, found such as had halted, abandoned such as had bolted, and returned to the dead friend to perform the last rites! 'When we had

poured the earth upon our *late* fellow-traveller we were grieved, aye and what an hour of grief it was.' 3

Then we turned again towards the desert and entered it. We journeyed on till the provision bag contracted and supplies were well nigh exhausted. We could neither advance nor retreat, and we dreaded the two slayers, thirst and hunger, when a horseman came in sight. We went towards him and moved

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in his direction. When we reached him, he alighted from his noble steed, 1 kissed the ground 2 and prostrated himself. 3 He then came towards me, to the exclusion of the company, kissed my stirrup and sought shelter at my side. I beheld and lo! a face that shone like the sheen of the rain-cloud, and a goodly stature,

'When the beholder's eye ascends 4 to, his head and descends to his feet,
It is unable to take in all his beauties,'

a cheek upon which the down had appeared and a moustache that had just sprouted; a plump forearm, a supple and slim body. 5 His origin was Turkish 6 and his dress royal. 7 We said: 'Perish thy father!' 8 What has happened to thee?

He replied: 'I am the servant of a king who made a determined attempt to kill me, and so I ran away, I knew not whither, as you see me now.' Now his appearance bore witness to the truth of his statement. Then he said: 'To-day I am thy servant and what is mine is thine!' I said, 'Good tidings for both of us. Thy journey has brought thee to a spacious court and fresh delight.' The company congratulated me, and

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he began to look and his glances smote us; he commenced to speak and his words fascinated us. He said: 'O masters! at the base of this mountain there is a spring and ye have entered a waterless desert, 1 so take some water from there.' So we turned rein in the direction he indicated and we arrived there. The noonday heat had melted our bodies and the locusts had mounted the trees. 2 He said: 'Will you not take the noonday nap beneath this spacious shade, and near this fresh water?' We said: 'As thou wilt.' He then dismounted from his horse, undid his belt, removed his tunic 3 so that nothing concealed him from us, except a thin undergarment which did but reveal his body. We doubted not but that he had quarrelled with the ministering angels, 4 evaded the heavenly guards, and fled from the guardian of Paradise. He betook himself to the saddles and removed them, to the horses and fed them, 5 and to the resting-places and sprinkled them with water. Men's perception was bewildered at him, and their eyes were fixed upon him. So I said: 'O young man, how courteous thou art in service and how generally useful! Therefore woe to him whom thou hast forsaken, and blessed is he with whom thou hast become friendly! How is it possible to thank God for His favour through thee?' He said:

'That which you will soon see from me will be even greater. Do my activity in service and my general comeliness please you? What if ye were to see me in company, showing some portion of my skill? It would increase your admiration 6 for me.' We said: 'Go on!' Then he took one of our bows, strung it, braced the bow-string, put it into the notch, and shot it up towards the sky and then

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followed it up with another and split it in the air. Then he said: 'I will show you another trick.' He then made for my quiver and seized it, went towards my horse and mounted it, and shot one of our number with an arrow which he fixed in his chest, and then a second one which he shot through his back. I cried out 'Sirrah! what art thou doing?' He retorted 'Silence, scoundrel! By heavens, every one of you shall bind his fellow's hands, or I will make his spittle to choke him.' Nov with our horses tied up, our saddles off, our arms beyond our reach, he mounted and we on foot, his bow in his hand ready to shoot us in the back, or to pierce our abdomens and chests, we were at a loss what to do. But, when we saw his seriousness, we seized the thong and bound one another. I alone remained with no one to tie my hands. So he said to me: 'Strip!' 1 and I stripped. Then he got down from the horse and began to slap each of us, one after the other, and to take off his clothes, and finally he came to me. Now I had on a pair of new boots and so he said to me: 'Perish thy mother! take them off' I replied: 'I put these boots on when the hide was raw and, therefore, I cannot remove them.' He said: 'I will take them off.' Then he drew near to me to remove them, and I stretched my hand to seize a knife which I had concealed in one boot while he was engaged removing the other. I plunged the knife into his abdomen with such force, that I caused it to appear behind his back, and he uttered but one cry 2 and then bit the dust. 3 Then I arose, went to my companions and untied their hands. And we then divided the spoils 4 obtained from the two dead men. We found our friend had given up the ghost and so we buried him. 5 Then we continued our journey and arrived at Ḥimṣ after five nights' travelling. Now when we reached an open space in the market, we saw a man with a wallet and a small walking-stick in his hand, standing in front of his son and little daughter, and he was saying:--

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'God bless him who fills my wallet 1 with his generous gifts,
God bless him who is moved to pity for Sa’íd and Fatimah,
Verily he will be your male-servant and she your maid-servant.'

Said ‘Ísá ibn Hishám: This man is surely al-Iskanderí of whom I have heard, and regarding whom I have been asking; and behold it was he! 2 So I gently approached him and said: 'Command what is thine.' He replied: 'A dirhem.' I said:--

'Thou canst have a dirhem 3 multiplied by its like
As long as I live.

So make up thy account and ask
In order that I may give what is demanded.'

[paragraph continues] And I said to him: 'A dinar into two, into three, into four, into five, until I reached twenty.' Then I said: 'How much dost thou make it?' He answered: 'twenty loaves.' 4 So I commanded that amount to be given him and said: 'Nought avails without God's help 5 and there is no device against ill-fatedness.'

Footnotes

40:4 The *Maqámát of al-Iskanderí*. The first example of the use of the word Maqámát by the author.

40:5 … *Wizards:* pl. of … Heb. כֹּהֵן a priest in a degraded sense. In the time of the Prophet it meant a fortune-teller, an interpreter of dreams, etc. See Qur'án, lii, 29 and lxix, 42. This is a word whose origin is not known.

40:6 *His indifference, etc.:* Literally, the sitting down of his resolution with his state.

41:1 *Her benefits:* Literally, her affairs, or business.

41:2 *Ḥimṣ* (Emessa): A well-known city situated half-way between Damascus and Aleppo. The inhabitants of this city were 'Alí's stoutest opponents in Mu'awiya's army in the battle of Siffín (AḌ. 657). Yaqút, ii, 334.

41:3 *Eliminating its distance:* Literally plundering its distance.

41:4 … *Locks and tresses:* … are said to pertain to women and … to men.

41:5 *Stampeded:* Literally, became agitated.

41:6 … *garb:* applied to a garment when it is furred, a well-known kind of garment for preservation from the cold.

41:7 *With inflated skin:* Literally, inflated in his skin.

41:8 … *courage:* Literally, the heart.

42:1 *Tawny of skin, etc.:* Metre, *ramal*.

…

'And I am the tawny: and who knows me?
The tawny of skin (of pure race) of the family that comprises the nobility of the Arabs.'

…

'He who contends for superiority (literally vies with me in filling buckets) with me, contends with one possessing glory.
Who fills the bucket up to the tying of the rope attached to the middle of its crossbars.'

These verses are by al-Faḍl Ibn ‘Abbás al-Lahabí, *Aghání*, xiv, 171. This poet was a contemporary of Farazdaq (d. 170), *Aghání*, xv, 2-11.

42:2 *Crouched, etc.:* Literally, made his chest a bed.

42:3 *Aye and what an hour of grief it was!* Metre, *ṭawíl*. Cf. the line of Ka’ah, *Ḥamasah* (Freytag), p. 95, line 3.

43:1 … *His noble steed:* The adjective is placed before instead of after the noun.

43:2 *Kissed the ground:* Literally, he engraved the ground with his lips.

43:3 *Prostrated himself:* Literally, he met the ground with both his hands.

43:4 … *When the eye ascends:* A quotation from Imral--Qais, p. 25, line 69. Lyall's edition of the *Mu‘allaqát*. The text is wrongly vocalized: for … read ….

43:5 … *A supple and slim body:* Literally, a well-irrigated branch a branch cut off and hence a rod.

43:6 *His origin was Turkish:* Probably an allusion to the line.

…

'Verily Yemák hath (by his death) left in my entrails an affection.
For every immigrant of Turkish origin,' Mutanabbí, p. 467.

43:7 … *angelic*, should be vocalized … royal.

43:8 *Perish thy father:* Literally, thou hast no father. A playful term of imprecation expressive of surprise or admiration. Al-Hamadhání did not think this phrase unworthy of elucidation. He explains, 'the Arabs say thou hast no father concerning anything that is perfect, but it depends upon who says it.' (Letters, p. 249.) For the explanation of the use of the accusative in this and similar expressions, see Wright's Arabic Grammar, ii, 94-5.

44:1 *Waterless desert:* Literally, a blind desert, with no … eye, or spring.

44:2 *The locusts had mounted the trees:* They were rendered active by the intense heat.

44:3 … *a tunic*, waistcoat or jacket, arabicized from the Persian …

44:4 … *ministering angels:* Probably … a species of angels who were the guardians of the earth, and of the gardens of Paradise (See Lane, art: … p. 462).

44:5 … *Fed them:* Literally, foddered them.

44:6 … *admiration:* from … the pericardium and then love which is supposed to tear the pericardium.

45:1 *Strip:* Literally, come out with thy skin from thy clothes.

45:2 *He uttered but one cry:* Literally, he only opened his mouth.

45:3 *He bit the dust:* Literally, put the stone in his mouth. Another reading … I silenced him. Cf. Freytag, *Arab Proverbs*, i, 120.

45:4 *We divided the spoils:* A rather unworthy manner of disposing of their dead friend's property.

45:5 *We buried him:* Literally, he went to his tomb.

46:1 *God bless him who fills my wallets, etc*. Metre, *khafif*.

46:2 … *'And behold it was he!'* There was a controversy between the schools of Baṣra and Kúfa as to whether this phrase or … *And behold it was him*--was right. The Baṣrians held that the former, the one used by al-Hamadhání, was correct. This phrase would call to mind the dispute originated by Sibawayh, the greatest of grammarians, in the time of the Khalífa Hárún al-Rashid (Yaqút, *Dictionary of Learned Men*, vi, 83). Cf. English, It is me, and the French, *c'est moi*.

46:3 *Thou canst have a dirhem*. Metre, *kámil*.

46:4 *Twenty loaves:* very defective arithmetic which evokes a well-merited rebuke from 'Ísá ibn Hishám in the concluding sentences of the Maqáma.

46:5 … *Without God's help:* See Qur'án, iii, 154.